Chapter 3

Fighting for Existence and Recognition Among Sub-Dynasty Communities: A Case Study of the Nerumedzo People in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The central focus of this chapter is to discuss the way sub-dynasties create new identities and culture quite different from their original-root-dynasties. The study case is related to the Nerumedzo people who have proven to be a sub-dynasty of the Karanga Duma of Bikita district. The literature highlights that the Nerumedzo people originated from a branch of the Duma Confederacy and have created through time their own new identity, which is based on their culture in a bid to fight for their existence in the Duma community and their alignment with the landscape (which includes their physical geography and insects and the use of identity markers like naming and totems). Their tradition was marked by the birth of Nemeso (who was born double-faced and, for this reason, rejected by his father Pfupajena), the Nerumedzo progenitor. The rejection of the mysterious Nemeso meant a death threat. Therefore, his mother fled with him to her own people with whom he grew up. From a foreign country, he returned to his father who gave him land in the Duma confines of Bikita, where it became the base of his identity.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter reconnoiters the life of the Nerumedzo people who have claimed a Karanga Duma ancestry from their progenitor Nemeso who was born double-faced from the Pfupajena branch of the Duma confederacy. Due to their inferiority and insignificance in the Duma community, the Nerumedzo people have constructed a new identity which is based on their culture to fight for their existence. They have DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-4186-8.ch003
used identity markers such as totemism, alignment to space surrounding them as well as naming, to advance their new identity construction. However, it is important to note that the culture is mainly based on their landscape which manifests in two forms. They align themselves with their physical geography that is the Rumedzo Mountain and the Rumedzo forest. The Nerumedzo, however, have an interesting shift from the obvious physical geography in their fight for existence and recognition. They also align themselves to edible stinkbugs (Encosternum delegorguei Spinola) locally known as Harurwa which became the basis for their identity in the Duma community. This shift indicates that landscape should be viewed as a broad term which may include many aspects which in this case include insects. It thus makes landscape very relevant in the experience of human beings as they always associate identity and recognition to their natural surroundings. This chapter maintains that the Nerumedzo people have managed to justify their existence in the Karanga Duma confederacy through aligning themselves to their landscape. It also shares the view that the Nerumedzo share the Karanga Duma ancestry just like any other Karanga Duma dynasties. It also explains the significance of the ‘Harurwa’ insects in the life and development of the Nerumedzo identity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Identity

Fighting for existence and recognition among sub-dynasty communities should be viewed from the broad spectrum of cultural identity. Cultural identity is the feeling of belonging to a group. Galik (2003) views it as a set of customs, institutions, ideas, ideals, and values, created and developed throughout history, that form a continual entity within a general and unequivocal cultural continuum. This is usually associated with one nation (and any nationalities or minorities belonging to it) living in a particular State or within a larger cultural community. It thus becomes part of a person’s self-conception and self-perception and is most importantly related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any social group that has its own distinct culture (Anderson & Collins, 2007). As noted by Jenkins (1996), cultural identity has many forms, the most important is its linguistic, literary, artistic, philosophical and religious forms covering a smaller or greater extent of time and space. Cultural identities thus reflect common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide members of societies with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. Such frames of references should surpass shifting divisions and conflicts in a society’s actual history (Galik, 2000).

Among the Nerumedzo however, historical experience indicates a phenomenon which made them unwilling to be identified with the Duma but rather create a new culture which gave them a new identity within the Duma community. Such a development according to Alexander (2004), is an effect of cultural trauma that affects a certain group of people in a society leaving with them an indelible mark in the form of collective memory feeling. Because trauma is not natural, it is socially created just like identity and race as Alexander (2004), noted, the Nerumedzo sought to fight for existence and recognition through creating a new identity basing on their physical geography. In constructing the new identity, they seek to exclude those who cannot be assimilated because of their traditions of origin. This is true of the Nerumedzo who began a subculture which promotes self-identity and self-sufficiency in how they regard themselves in the Duma society. It thus becomes imperative to discuss subculture as a concept because it is key in this discussion.